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ABSTRACT

This paper underscores the need for entrepreneurship education in Canada's community colleges and presents a description of Confederation College's (CC's) entrepreneurial curriculum. A history of the growth of entrepreneurial businesses in Canada is followed by a discussion of the need for entrepreneurial education at the community college level. This section discusses entrepreneurship as a very practical applied subject that can be taught inside or outside of a college business division to provide people with the skills necessary to start their own business. The objectives of teaching entrepreneurial education are presented next, indicating that general interest courses should focus on making people aware of the option of entrepreneurship and the rewards and risks involved, while courses designed for those already sold on the idea of entrepreneurship should focus on teaching the technical skills needed for a successful start-up or business survival. A section on curriculum content is presented next, using CC's 19-course program as a model. This program includes courses on the characteristics, motivation, and behavior of entrepreneurs; creative thinking, idea generation, and problem solving; market analysis, and consumer and competition surveys; advertising approaches; and the pressures faced by entrepreneurs. The final two sections deal with teaching methods and the importance of learning by doing. (VVC)

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THE CENTRE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR THE NORTHWEST

"Encouraging entrepreneurial behavior is critical to the long-term vitality of the economy. Since entrepreneurship creates jobs and promotes innovation, it has an important role to play in efforts to revitalize and diversify the northern Ontario economy."

"The challenge ahead lies in accelerating the development of prospective and existing entrepreneurs . . . and in stimulating new enterprises and strengthening the growth of new ones."

(excerpts from the Report of the Premier's Conference for Northern Business and Entrepreneurship, November, 1987, Thunder Bay.)

Evidence of the "entrepreneurial revolution exists on many fronts, from increased literature and business news to economic, political and educational policy.

The above conclusions of the Premier's conference further underscore this direction and led to the establishment of the **Centre of Entrepreneurship for the Northwest.**

The centre will serve as the focal point for entrepreneurial education activities in northwestern Ontario postsecondary institutions. It is jointly sponsored and managed by Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology and Lakehead University and their respective corollaries — The Northwest Enterprise Centre and Innovation North — both of which have championed regional entrepreneurial endeavours.

This moves recognizes the important role of education to train not only tomorrow's employees, but also tomorrow's employers.

MANDATE

Under the auspices of the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, the **Centre of Entrepreneurship** will promote and encourage entrepreneurial endeavours within a northern context by:

- teaching of entrepreneurship on an interdisciplinary basis.
- research on entrepreneurship
- activities to increase public awareness about entrepreneurship

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The purpose is to introduce the entrepreneurial ethic into the academic mainstream of postsecondary institutions primarily aimed at the would-be entrepreneur from the student body.

Beginning September 1988, the **Centre for Entrepreneurship** will offer the first of four courses on an elective basis:

Level 1 — Entrepreneurial Perspectives — an introductory course to the role of entrepreneurship in the economy which explores individual suitability and new venture opportunities — one semester, twice a year.

By 1990, the following additional courses will be offered:
Level 2 — Planning for New Ventures
Level 3 — Venturing for Start-Up Success
Level 4 — Managing for Growth

TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

Graham Clayton, Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with teaching entrepreneurial studies at the college level in Canada. It begins with an introduction to Canada's entrepreneurship experience in the 1980s, and of the need for entrepreneurship education. It goes on to discuss the reasons for teaching it at the college level. This is followed by a discussion of the different objectives that may be set down for design of entrepreneurial curriculum. The following three sections of the paper deal with curriculum content, curriculum delivery, and learning by doing. Reference is made to the experiences of Confederation College in those areas.

INTRODUCTION

It would probably be quite accurate to describe the 1980s in Canada as the "Decade of the Entrepreneur". Out of the ashes of the 1982 recession came a surge of new business start-ups that gained momentum as the decade progressed. What started out as a quiet revolution gained media attention as the rate of new firm start-ups surpassed 150,000 per year, and the number of self-employed rose to more than a million and a half people. The discovery that small and medium-sized business - and increasingly <u>new</u> small and medium-sized business - were responsible for the lion's share of net job creation in Canada, drew further attention to - and applause for - entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The fact that the Canadian rate of new venture creation per million of population surpassed that of our capitalist neighbour to the south, was a startling revelation to many. Small wonder then that entrepreneurs became the modern heroes of the business media.

There was, of course, a somewhat disturbing downside to all of this; namely, that somewhere between 70 and 80 percent of new business start-ups failed to survive beyond five years. Indeed, it was not unusual for 30 or 40 percent of the new start-ups to close within their first year of operation. The resource waste, financial cost, and personal hardship resulting from this, was, and is, a serious issue.

Analysis of the causes of new business/young business failures have revealed a fairly common set of causal factors. Interestingly, it has been found that many businesses that fail, should never have opened. The product, service, or business format which was to be the basis of the business, was either so poor or so narrow in appeal as to be commercially non-viable. Many other businesses fail in spite of their being based on a good idea. *"How can this happen?"* one might ask. Actually, it's quite simple. Many would-be entrepreneurs are quite ignorant of the realities of what it takes to launch a new business. They often start businesses with inadequate financing - so-called "under-capitalization". They get caught between the scissor blades of under-estimated costs and over-estimated sales, and simply run out of money and credit. A disturbingly large number of new business owners either fail to plan or plan poorly. Their approach

to purchasing, stocking, staffing, and selling is poorly conceived and carried out. Decision-making is often by the seat of the pants. Their management skills may be rudimentary or virtually non-existent, and their ability to exercise good judgement or to deal with risk and uncertainty is insufficient. And so on. The question which all of this begs is: Can something be done to remedy these deficiencies and thereby lower the failure rate? The answer, of course, is yes.

This author, like many others, believes that much can be done through education. This does not mean that a person can be given a course in entrepreneurship and thereby become a successful entrepreneur. This would be no more reasonable than to expect a person who took appropriate courses in geometry and physics to become a billiards champion. The education can, however, provide people with a greater awareness of the nature and challenges of entrepreneurship - along with a variety of skills, insights, and understanding which will be valuable in the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career. Conversely, it may assist some people in making a wise decision not to try to start their own business because they are ill-suited for the types of demands which entrepreneurship will place upon them.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE COLLEGES

Colleges, as institutions of applied learning, are particularly well-suited to the teaching of entrepreneurial subjects, and yet, many have relatively little if anything to offer in this area. Why is this so? Partly, because entrepreneurship is a relatively new subject area in Canada whose need is still being discovered. It is also partly due to a lack of knowledgeable staff, or to budget-type restrictions. What do we drop to make room for entrepreneurship?

There is also the belief in some quarters that small business management subjects cover all of the basic knowledge areas that a prospective entrepreneur would require. This belief is wrong.

There are many people who can manage an existing business. There are far fewer people who can start a business from nothing but an idea.

The types of demands placed on a person endeavouring to start a new firm are very different from the demands placed on a manager in an established firm. Accordingly, the types of knowledge and skills required differ significantly. A review of the topics typically covered in entrepreneurship subjects reveals many areas of learning outside the realm of small business management.

Entrepreneurship is a very practical applied subject which could be taught inside or outside of a college business division. Many of the programs widely taught in colleges provide students with skills and expertise which could serve as the basis for starting their own business. Colleges have a range of programs where self-employment is a distinct career option upon graduation. Given this, a college can enhance the career/employment options open to their students by offering entrepreneurship subjects or by inserting entrepreneurial classes in existing program subjects.

OBJECTIVES OF ENTREPRENEURIAL STUDIES

In designing and delivering subjects in entrepreneurship, colleges may have any of a wide range of objectives in mind. For example, it may be desired to offer a course aimed at increasing public awareness of the nature and role of entrepreneurship in our economy. Such principles-type courses cover all of the general topic areas at a level geared to the general interest student, but contain enough specifics to be of considerable value to the "would-be" entrepreneur. Such courses usually provide enough information to enable students to make the decision about whether or not entrepreneurship is an attractive career option. For those who conclude that it isn't for them, and they are often the majority, they at least have a better understanding and appreciation of what entrepreneurs go through to create the businesses that provide the jobs for over four million of their fellow citizens.

It is widely agreed that in teaching entrepreneurial studies it is not the objective to sell people on entrepreneurship. Rather, the intent is to make people aware of the option, and of the rewards and risks that it entails. In one workshop for high school teachers, this writer was asked if he was trying to scare people off by going into detail about some of the more negative aspects of an entrepreneurial career. The intent was to show the good and the bad, to make it possible for people to make a better informed decision - not to promote new business start-up.

Courses geared to students who are either already leaning toward or sold on the idea of entrepreneurship are designed with different objectives in mind. Here the intent is to transfer technical skills aimed at increasing the students' prospects for successful start-up. These include not only the basics of good business organization and management, but also a great deal of survival skills not typically taught in conventional business courses. More will be said about this shortly.

In teaching entrepreneurial studies, the issue of business failure is ever-present. Clearly, the objective of every entrepreneur is to succeed in business, not to fail, and yet high failure rates are currently a fact of life for young businesses. One of the objectives of entrepreneurship courses should be to get students to view failure in a different light. Clearly, failure in business is something to be avoided if possible, but it is not always possible. Fear of failure stops many people from trying entrepreneurship. Negatively reacting to failure stops many others from ever trying again. It is fact that many ultimately-successful entrepreneurs fail in their first business ventures but learn and grow, and try again. They have a view of and a reaction to failure which is different from that of most of society. If you had failed your driver's licence test, would you have tried again? One of the objectives of teaching entrepreneurship should be to counsel students on ways of containing the damage from business failure. Just as there are times to start a new business, there are also times to scale them back or shut them down.

Thus far the discussion of courses and objectives in entrepreneurial studies has been geared to the general interest student or the prospective entrepreneur. There is a notable third group of students for which a college may develop a course or program. These are the practising entrepreneurs who are struggling to

survive or grow, and who are in need of entrepreneurial skills upgrading. As mentioned earlier, entrepreneurial studies is a relatively new field in Canadian postsecondary education. Consequently, most of the people who have started businesses on their own have done so largely without benefit of any entrepreneurship education and training. Many of them are hanging in by a thread, and many others have run up against obstacles that are thwarting their efforts to grow. Curriculum can be designed to meet the survival and growth needs of these students.

CURRICULUM CONTENT

Confederation College in Thunder Bay now offers nineteen courses, including a one-year certificate program plus five seminar programs in the area of entrepreneurial studies. The content of this curriculum varies considerably according to the needs and objectives of the students. Despite this, there are topics which consistently draw high interest among students.

Students are interested in the characteristics, motivation, and behaviour of entrepreneurs. They want to know what makes entrepreneurs entrepreneurial. This is a subject that we delve into at length usually with the intent of having students conduct an assessment of their own entrepreneurial potential and readiness.

A related topic which we teach in three of our entrepreneurship courses is creative thinking, idea generation, and problem-solving. This includes about twenty formalized left- and right-brain techniques, plus other informal methods.

Other topics which garner a great deal of student interest include market niche identification and measurement, consumer surveys, analysis of the competition, and the selection of advertising approaches. Students also show considerable interest in issues involved in dealing with customers, and with employees.

Finally, students are usually quite intrigued by discussions of the pressures, demands, and problems faced by the entrepreneur. Detailed discussions of the workload, causes of stress, and personal well-being of the entrepreneur are often a revelation to students. They see in our discussions of how to deal with workload and stress - life skills that can be applied in many areas.

Perhaps surprisingly, students have not always shown a great deal of interest in discussions of success and failure factors in business. Discussions of entrepreneurial do's and don'ts, including discussions of networking and know-how, draw somewhat more interest.

On the student popularity flip-side, there are a whole range of important topics which, perhaps because of their more technical nature, are often less enthusiastically received. These include business organization, legal and tax issues, financial planning, record keeping, business plans, intellectual property rights protection, insurance, and sources of financing for start-up. These topics are, however, highly valued by those students who are planning a start-up or are already operating a business.

CURRICULUM DELIVERY

Basically, when it comes to teaching entrepreneurial studies you use what works. This may involve considerable experimentation and the use of non-conventional formats. We have found, for example, that many adult students do not want to sit in a classroom, take tests, or do assignments. Our Northwest Enterprise Centre responded by offering a series of entrepreneurial seminar programs with no formal student assessment procedure.

Also, what works for some students doesn't work well for others. Many students in our elective courses drop the course in favour of other electives that entail less work. Some of these courses have counterparts in our one-year certificate program with a similar work load and assignments. By contrast, these students rise to the occasion seeing the work as good preparation for their planned start-up activities.

As with much of education, if you can make your material entertaining you often have a much better chance of getting your point home. Our students respond positively to anecdotal illustrations, short, true-life scenarios, and cases in point. Occasionally, we also briefly lead them down the garden path, playing on the fact that many of them will pursue one particular train of thought when in fact a quite different one is required. This is aimed at both providing the student with a memory aid as well as getting them to break out of more conventional thought patterns.

Too much teaching is devoid of passion. In teaching entrepreneurship, passion has a definite place. It's the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, the excitement of discovery and the drain of the ninety-hour work week. This has to be communicated to the student if they are to get a proper appreciation of what entrepreneurship is about.

Class presentations by articulate, successful, or struggling entrepreneurs is an excellent delivery option - both for driving points home and for reinforcing or affirming the subject matter being taught. We have established a mentor group of local entrepreneurs who we can call upon to help us in delivering our curriculum.

LEARNING BY DOING

Entrepreneurial studies is one of those fields of education where much can be achieved by the use of learning by doing exercises and assignments. In particular, there are a variety of benefits to be realized by getting students out of the classroom and library and into the real functioning world. When we designed our fourteen-course certificate program, it was our intention, as far as possible, to replace tests and exams with hands-on assignments geared to learning by doing. We have similarly made extensive use of such assignments in our other entrepreneurship courses. These assignments include entrepreneur interviews, case studies, consumer surveys, opportunity identification and

assessment exercises, cash flow analyses, simulation exercises, competition analyses, planning assignments, and other field work. We also use class presentations of assignments to give students experience in public speaking and in making a pitch.

While we have had some excellent results on these assignments, we have also had our disappointments. We attribute part of the drop rate in our elective courses to a reluctance on the part of students to do these assignments. On the other hand, some of our students have taken the assignments as an opportunity to do some work on their own business ideas for course credit.

To date, we have had fairly good results in terms of how students have evaluated our courses and programs. The most common assessment of the courses that we see is "challenging". That is exactly what we want to achieve.

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